(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) The telecommunications is a very wide subject and the broader issues relating to it cannot be restricted only to interconnection. The Expert Group got a limited scope and, therefore, broader issues relating to telecommunications will not be addressed by this Expert Group.

Indian Fishermen detained in Pak Jails

*417. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has received representations about the thousands of Indian fishermen languishing in Pakistan Jails;

(b) to what extent Government are giving priority to this problem;

(c) whether special officer is being appointed to contact the Government of Pakistan and secure their immediate release;

(d) whether Government are not able to reach an agreement with the Pakistani Government to treat such problems involving fishing boats as a routine matter; and

(e) whether it is proposed to give top priority to this problem of Indian fishermen and Indian fishing boats being seized by Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Government is giving high priority to this problem.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) The Governments of India and Pakistan have exchanged proposals for cooperation between Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, *inter alia*, to deal with the issue of apprehended fishermen.

During the Foreign Secretary level talks held in New Delhi on June 27-28, 2004 it was agreed to release all the apprehended fishermen in each other's custody and to put in place a mechanism for the return of unintentionally transgressing fishermen and their boats from the high seas without apprehending them.

During the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries in New Delhi on September 5-6, 2004, it was agreed to have a meeting of

Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency to, *inter alia*, discuss the Memorandum of Understanding for establishing communication link between them and to set up a mechanism to deal with the issue of apprehended fishermen effectively and speedily.

Again, during the Foreign Secretary level talks held on December 27-28, 2004 at Islamabad it was agreed that consular access would be given to all the civilian prisoners (including fishermen) held in each other's country within three months from the date of their arrest and repatriation would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification.

During the visit of External Affairs Minister to Pakistan from February 15-17, 2005 the issue of early release and repatriation of all the Indian fishermen along with their boats was again taken up.

The Government is constantly in touch with the Government of Pakistan for early release and repatriation of the Indian fishermen and their boats. Pakistan government has released 266 Indian fishermen on January 06, 2005 and 528 fishermen on March 22, 2005.

Group 'A' Services in BSNL/MTNL

*418. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government considers Telecom as a specialized Department;

(b) if so, the steps being taken to ensure its specialized character after the option of absorption is offered to the specialized Group 'A' services in the BSNL/MTNL;

(c) if not, the steps being taken so that it becomes a specialized department especially in wake of some Telecom operators grossly violating Government license regulations;

(d) whether Government have considered the need of a proper specialized Government monitoring system; and

(e) if so, how Government plans to monitor the huge and burgeoning Telecom network across the country to ensure that security of the country is not jeopardized?